



INTEROPERABILITY IN VIRGINIA



Panel Name: **Understanding Mutual Aid and Interoperability Channels Statewide**

Speakers:

- **Jim Sobecke**, Mutual Aid & Interoperability IAT Co-Lead
- **Charlie Hoffman**, NTIA/Public Safety Division
- **Don Bowers**, Capt., Fairfax County Fire and Rescue

General Comments:

If you are operating on a VTAC or UTAC channel you are the primary and everyone else is a secondary operator. Localities could license the channels for their mobiles.

Earlier licensed users for what are now designated the V-CALL/TAC and U-CALL/TAC channels are now secondary users and may not interfere with emergency communications by public safety (primary users). Localities with VHF and UHF radios should program as many of the V-CALL/TAC or U-CALL/TAC channels as possible in their mobile and portables. (This should not require a licensing action, but the process would show that the jurisdiction is "interoperable".)

Question and Answer Session:

Q: Are there any military designations?

A: No, this may be a good use of state designations (*for example, one of the SIEC authorized designations in the 3xx-399 group.*)

The use of "M" would have no significance, because the military frequencies are actually within the purview of the NTIA. Therefore, they would be eligible for the "F" designation, should they be identified for interoperability with non-federal entities. There are some "common channels" in the UHF (Military) Air band (e.g., 345.0 MHz) that are designated for Air Search and rescue coordination. Any public safety entity with a requirement to communicate with air search and rescue platforms would have to have a radio in that band and be "sanctioned" for its use.

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Q: Is there a licensing method to add these federal channels on state radios.

A: Not at this time. It is an issue being addressed between the NTIA and the FCC.

It might be appropriate during future discussions on the use of the NTIA Fed Interoperability Channel to discuss a statewide license for mobile use - VDEM for the Incident Response channels and the VSP for the Law Enforcement group. A letter of authorization could be provided to designated users (local and county) through an application process coordinated by the SIEC/CICO. Licensing of base stations (if allowed) would be handled through normal FCC licensing procedures.

Q: Page 39 of the handout has analog and digital channels, I thought it was decided not to use digital channels for interoperability.

A: It was copied from SAFECOM's website. Interoperability (VHF-LO, VHF-HIGH, UHF and 800 MHz) is with analog. 700MHz is digital.

Q: Naming analog channels a certain name and the digital channel?

A: May be a good way to use the 10th digit on the radio channel. Need to note the difference between digital channels and analog channels that have the same designations on the radio, only difference is analog or digital.

There may be some confusion here. The 700 MHz Interoperability Channel scheme and designations are DIGITAL ONLY - no need to identify an "analog" application that is not allowed. For the other bands the Interoperability channels were intended to be the lowest common denominator ("ANALOG"). I believe that the P25 standard does not force the interoperability channel to be used in the digital mode. Isn't a P25 radio supposed to be 'backward compatible' to analog?

Q: Does the NTIA have provisions for analog, digital, and p25?

A: Yes. Analog and digital specifications are identified in Chapter 5 of the NTIA Manual.

Q: Is there going to be an attempt to inventory these resources?

A: Initiative Action Team (IAT) 6 was working on a database of channel designations. The baseline study will include channels and frequencies for mutual aid and interoperability.

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Q: Are localities required to be licensed with the FCC for interoperability channels, such as VTAC, UTAC?

A: If the locality is the holder of any valid FCC Part 90.20 license, they do NOT need an individual license to operate mobiles or portables. However if they are going to license permanent fixed stations, such as base stations they will need to have that go through frequency coordination. Please refer to www.fcc.gov for more information

Q: Have you heard of the VCALL frequency as a point to point calling frequency?

A: Call channel should be a monitored *from* a fixed site. A lot of states have a statewide license for the VTAC and UTAC channels and have fixed base stations to monitor those channels.

Q: Will there be interoperability on the 380-400 MHz band?

A: That is not planned at this time.

I think that is doubtful. The DoD has created this new sub band for military post and airbase trunking systems. If there is a local need for interoperability with a nearby military base it might best be handled by written agreement and 'trading radios'. This has been an ongoing practice between the DoD and the local public safety entities.

Q: Has the 410 band been cleaned up?

A: It is not required to go to narrowband till January 2008, but that should help clean up the band.

Q: VTAC, UTAC, etc was supposed to be in all state agency radios, VSP was encouraged not to leave the STARS channels to talk on the VTAC and UTAC channels. How are we going to overcome this when it is needed to speak with the state agencies?

A: First, we have to have the channels programmed into the radios. When a large scale event occurs, if working the event, the officer should be on the interoperability channel, the commanders will be communicating with their respective agencies. This is the ideal situation and follows NIMS. STARS will be able to patch in to all frequencies when finished.

Q: Are all the frequencies in narrowband?

A: 800MHz will be analog and the radios will be capable of going to those channels. Calling channels, a radio 911, anyone with 800MHz radios can contact any Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) in the country. It is no longer

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going to happen because some states have chosen not to implement it and monitor those channels.

Q: For the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), what are the procedures for using the Federal Interoperability Channels if you are a state or locality?

A: Procedures for the use of the Federal Interoperability Channels are identified in Section 4.3.16 of the NTIA Manual. NTIA highly encourages the use of these channels. As long as a Federal agency is involved, the channels can be used for interoperability. The NTIA is further working the issue with the FCC that if an incident would last less than 7 days, a Special Temporary Authorization (STA) would not be required. We are working with the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to develop rules for use by non-Federal agencies.

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